

CP always top priority for Bethel Church

By William H. Perkins Jr.
Editor

At Bethel Church outside Water Valley, supporting the Cooperative Program (CP) is more than a responsibility.

"I'd say it's the lifestyle of the church, passed down from generation to generation," said James Edwards, the church's bivocational pastor for nearly nine years. "It's the spirit of the church. We don't ask ourselves whether we can afford it; we ask if this is what the Lord wants us to do."

Frann Womble, who has been

a member of Bethel Church for 48 years and currently serves as treasurer, said the congregation feels strongly that CP is worthy of their support.

"We have always had a core group of people who felt that if we're going to be a part of Yalobusha Association, the Mississippi Baptist Convention, and the Southern Baptist Convention, we need to financially support those programs.

"Bethel is a missions-minded church, and that's where we get our CP focus. When people join the church, they learn that real quick," she pointed out.

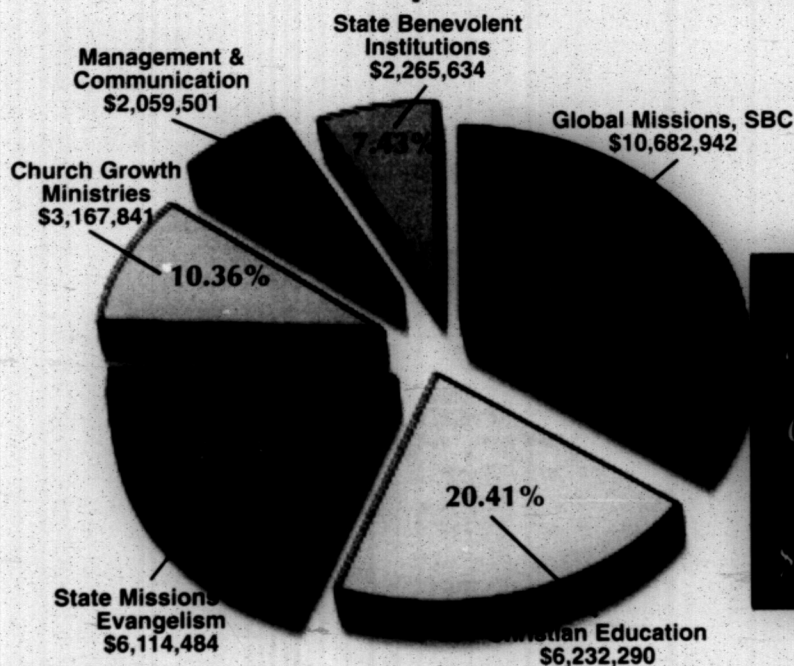
As if to prove the

point, the church's budget sheet lists their 15% contribution to CP at the very top. For Bethel Church, which averages about 50 people in Sunday School, that means almost \$20,000 will be given to CP this year before any other expenditures are considered.

"I think of it just like the tithe. Individuals should tithe a



CP SUPPORTERS — James Edwards (center), pastor of Bethel Church, Water Valley, joins deacon Buster Jackson (left) and church treasurer Frann Womble in leading their church to support the Cooperative Program (CP) in a big way. (Photo by William H. Perkins Jr.)



2000-2001 COOPERATIVE PROGRAM GIVING RECORD

Mission Causes	2000	2001
BEYOND MISSISSIPPI		
International Mission Board	5,105,301	5,219,594
North American Mission Board	2,295,984	2,379,090
Other SBC Ministries	2,640,499	2,840,503
Subtotal	10,041,784	10,439,187
WITHIN MISSISSIPPI		
State Missions & Evangelism	5,187,060	5,586,036
Christian Education in Mississippi	6,297,558	6,092,872
Church Growth Ministries	2,996,374	2,743,983
State Benevolent Ministries	2,030,861	2,131,723
MBC Management & Communication	2,373,801	2,832,447
Subtotal	18,885,654	19,387,061
Total Cooperative Program Gifts	\$28,927,438	\$29,826,248

portion of what the Lord has provided for them, and churches should do the same," said deacon Buster Jackson, a church member for 32 years.

Jackson said though the church has seen many changes and church leadership has rotated through the years, CP support has remained constant. Jackson believes the church's emphasis on missions is an important factor.

In recent years, the church has sent mission teams to Central America and raised more than \$10,000 for a fledgling church in Nicaragua. They are also deeply involved in local ministries, including a food program and other associational and community benevolences. Since the pastor owns his home, the church maintains the parsonage as a place for missionary families during their furlough in the United States.

Womble recalled that when she first began her duties as treasurer, she fretted about expenses and whether the church would stay in the black from month to month.

"At the end of every month, the money was always there. I had to realize that if the Lord wants us to do something, he will provide the resources to do it.

"Some members wanted to put the money in the bank, drawing interest. We had to get over that and get on with the Lord's business. The core of the church is dedicated to the tithe

and more, so we do the work the Lord has called us to do and trust him to provide," she said.

Edwards stressed that in addition to the church's CP, associational, and community missions commitments, members also give sacrificially to the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions, the Annie Armstrong Easter Offering for North American Missions, and the Margaret Lackey State Missions Offering.

"That's what I mean when I talk about the church's 'lifestyle.' We believe everything that comes into this church is the Lord's, and when you turn it all over to the Lord — it's his, anyway — you don't need to do the figuring. Make the commitment, and then just do it.

"We continually praise the Lord for the fact that you can't outgive him," Edwards said.

The pastor and the deacon also caution churches that might consider cutting CP as a good way to catch up on expenses or jump start a building program.

"The Lord won't bless it," he warned. "If they do that, they're not trusting the Lord to provide. A lot of times we try to subtract when the Lord really wants to multiply."

"Get your priorities in order and trust the Lord. Just open up your purse and see what the Lord will do," Jackson said.



CELEBRATE COOPERATIVE PROGRAM DAY

MISSISSIPPI BAPTIST CP CENTURY CLUB

CHURCH OFFERING CATEGORY: \$25,000 & BELOW

CHURCH/ASSOCIATION	CP GIFTS
BERWICK/MISSISSIPPI	\$6,604
ENON/WINSTON	\$4,697
MERIGOLD/MID-DELTA	\$2,720
TYRO/NORTHWEST	\$2,249
BLUE SPRINGS/UNION COUNTY	\$2,173
HEBRON/PONTOTOC	\$2,093
SHILOH/CARROLL	\$2,069
NEW FELLOWSHIP/JASPER	\$2,031
PROVIDENCE/ITAWAMBA	\$1,946
LAKEVIEW/WASHINGTON	\$1,881

CHURCH OFFERING CATEGORY: \$25,000 - \$39,999

CHURCH/ASSOCIATION	CP GIFTS
PROVIDENCE/BENTON-TIPPAH	\$5,718
CENTER RIDGE/KEMPER	\$5,625
ENON/PANOLA	\$4,248
HARMONY/PEARL RIVER	\$4,227
PLEASANT RIDGE/CALHOUN	\$3,830
UNION CHAPEL/LEE	\$3,808
FELLOWSHIP/PIKE	\$3,564
WEST/HOLMES	\$3,551
EBENEZER/MISSISSIPPI	\$3,527
UNION/FRANKLIN	\$3,488

CHURCH OFFERING CATEGORY: \$40,000 - \$54,999

CHURCH/ASSOCIATION	CP GIFTS
NEW HOPE/JONES	\$7,833
LOLLARS GROVE/WEBSTER	\$7,045
CROSBY/MISSISSIPPI	\$6,499
LIBERTY/WINSTON	\$6,440
FAYETTE/UNION	\$6,297
UNITY/GREENE	\$6,079
OAK GROVE/YAZOO	\$5,974
PALMETTO/LEE	\$5,812
ELON/NOXUBEE	\$5,783
LINN/MID-DELTA	\$5,776

CHURCH OFFERING CATEGORY: \$55,000 - \$74,999

CHURCH/ASSOCIATION	CP GIFTS
NEW HOPE/WEBSTER	\$13,595
PLEASANT HILL/UNION COUNTY	\$9,772
SABOUGLA/CALHOUN	\$8,915
LIBERTY/LAUDERDALE	\$8,820
OLDTOWN/CALHOUN	\$8,748
MYRTLE/UNION COUNTY	\$8,209
OLIVE/PEARL RIVER	\$8,175
MT PISGAH/CARROLL	\$7,988
LIBERTY/CARROLL	\$7,941
CONCORD/CALHOUN	\$7,840

CHURCH OFFERING CATEGORY: \$75,000 - \$99,999

CHURCH/ASSOCIATION	CP GIFTS
BIG CREEK/CALHOUN	\$18,281
CHERRY CREEK/PONTOTOC	\$18,038
CALVARY/WINSTON	\$13,530
RIVERSIDE/WAYNE	\$13,121
CONCORD/YAZOO	\$12,325
ROCK HILL/RANKIN	\$11,754
WEST SALEM/GREENE	\$11,740
SHUBUTA/CLARKE	\$11,322
CALVARY/NEWTON	\$10,917
MCCOOL/ATTALA	\$10,722

Church Offering Categories based on Total Gifts reported on the Annual Church Profile (October 2000-September 2001)

2002 CP MISSIONS



CHECKLIST

*Steps for Planning Your Church's
Cooperative Program Sunday*

☒ Designate a Sunday

April 14, 2002, is the official date on the denominational calendar, but your church may choose any Sunday that is appropriate. The resources are undated and available year-round.

☒ Duplicate the Cooperative Program Spreadsheet

Your church's Cooperative Program giving record is available to duplicate as a 11x17 insert. The spreadsheet consistently encourages church members to better understand and support mission giving. Order a print-out from Laura Marler in Missions Extension (800) 748-1651, ext. 231.

☒ Display the Calendar and Poster

A missions calendar is your gift this year. It reminds us to pray daily for those who serve as missionaries and for those God may call out this year. Posters are great for missions awareness. Order extras as you need them.

☒ Declare Your Partnership with Mississippi Baptists

A sermon from the pastor is a key ingredient in building a missions-minded church. A testimony from a church member who has participated in a missions project or a Mississippi Baptist Convention conference helps personalize the Cooperative Program.

☒ Determine Next Year's Support

Your church financial leadership group can become a partner in missions by prayerfully considering an increase in Cooperative Program gifts and making that recommendation at the appropriate time during budget planning.

Cooperative Program Gifts are actual receipts posted by the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board from October 2000-September 2001

CHURCH OFFERING CATEGORY: \$100,000 - \$149,999

CHURCH/ASSOCIATION	CP GIFTS
SKENE/MID-DELTA	\$34,001
CAUSEYVILLE/LAUDERDALE	\$23,073
CALVARY/LAWRENCE	\$22,241
CLIFF-TEMPLE/ADAMS	\$21,603
CLEAR CREEK/LAFAYETTE	\$21,129
FBC ANGUILLA INC/SHARKEY-ISSAQ	\$17,849
BETHEL/YALOBUSHA	\$17,813
CENTER RIDGE/YAZOO	\$17,288
UNION/CLARKE	\$17,186
FBC BUDE/FRANKLIN	\$17,148

CHURCH OFFERING CATEGORY: \$150,000 - \$249,999

CHURCH/ASSOCIATION	CP GIFTS
CARROLLTON/CARROLL	\$51,478
FBC ROLLING FORK/SHARKEY-ISSAQ	\$37,126
TERRY'S CREEK/PIKE	\$35,220
DUMAS/BENTON-TIPPAH	\$33,747
CROWDER/NORTH DELTA	\$33,408
SPRINGFIELD/SCOTT	\$32,949
NEW PROSPECT/LINCOLN	\$32,437
CATO/RANKIN	\$31,570
HARMONTOWN/LAFAYETTE	\$31,352
RAWLS SPRINGS/LEBANON	\$30,124

CHURCH OFFERING CATEGORY: \$250,000 - \$499,999

CHURCH/ASSOCIATION	CP GIFTS
FBC HOLLY SPRINGS/MARSHALL	\$73,515
NORTH COLUMBIA/MARION	\$68,886
NEW HEBRON/LAWRENCE	\$61,503
FBC RICHTON/PERRY	\$59,614
CALVARY STARKVILLE/GOLDEN TRIANGLE	\$57,706
HICKORY/NEWTON	\$55,790
FBC MAGNOLIA/PIKE	\$54,909
FBC UNION/NEWTON	\$52,337
PELAHATCHIE/RANKIN	\$50,696
LIBERTY/MISSISSIPPI	\$50,692

CHURCH OFFERING CATEGORY: \$500,000 - \$999,999

CHURCH/ASSOCIATION	CP GIFTS
FBC WINONA/MONTGOMERY	\$166,064
FBC HOUSTON/CHICKASAW	\$122,524
BRIAR HILL/RANKIN	\$121,966
MIDWAY/LAUDERDALE	\$113,996
FBC GRENADA/NORTH CENTRAL	\$112,183
FBC RIPLEY/BENTON-TIPPAH	\$105,754
OAKHURST/NORTH DELTA	\$105,256
HERNANDO/NORTHWEST	\$101,523
FBC PURVIS/LAMAR	\$101,297
FBC NEWTON/NEWTON	\$100,343

CHURCH OFFERING CATEGORY: \$1,000,000 & ABOVE

CHURCH/ASSOCIATION	CP GIFTS
FBC JACKSON/METRO	\$873,575
FBC BRANDON/RANKIN	\$449,245
COLONIAL HEIGHTS/METRO	\$377,746
CALVARY/LEE	\$355,541
MORRISON HEIGHTS/METRO	\$286,704
BROADMOOR/METRO	\$283,735
HARRISBURG/LEE	\$281,627
PINELAKE/RANKIN	\$271,543
FBC CLINTON/METRO	\$268,036
FAIRVIEW/GOLDEN TRIANGLE	\$238,500

Church Offering Categories based on Total Gifts reported on the Annual Church Profile (October 2000-September 2001)

Church using CP to reach local Muslims

ROCHESTER, Minn. (BP) —

"Muslims aren't the easiest people to reach with the Gospel, but that doesn't mean it's okay to pass them by," says George Ray, pastor of Emmanuel Church in Rochester, Minn.

"We do a lot of door-to-door visiting, and as we visit with Muslims, for the most part we have not found a way to help them be open to hearing the Gospel," Ray said. "It seems to be a very closed religious system, very difficult to break into."

Yet difficult is not impossible. Two

men a couple of years ago came several times for both Bible study and worship before leaving the area. Two other men at present are attending worship.

Muslims are not the only people on which Emmanuel Church focuses. This church in the city known internationally for Mayo Clinic has a 40-year history of reaching out locally, regionally, and globally.

The congregation, where nearly 200 people attend worship each Sunday, at present sponsors eight mission congregations, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes that have at least 40 people enrolled, and a highly developed visitation program based on LifeWay Christian Resources' GROW program.

For years the Rochester congregation has given 14% of undesignated receipts to the Cooperative Program (CP) Missions for Southern Baptist missions outreach globally and nationally; another 7% is given to Pioneer Association; and 1.5% is designated for its local mission congregations.

"We're able to participate in so many different things that Southern Baptists do and support so many missionaries through our cooperative efforts," church member Sarah Williamson said. "If we didn't have the Cooperative Program and tried to do missions on our own, we certainly couldn't do very much."

Williamson has been involved with Emmanuel's ESL program since it was started in 1968, serving as the director for about 20 years.

"I feel like it's what the Lord wants me to do," she said. "We have a lot of internationals here in Rochester. ESL is something we can do to help them and have a witness to them."

Hundreds of people — mostly wives of professionals working at Mayo Clinic or IBM — from 48 nations have participated in Emmanuel's ESL classes, which are not overtly Christian in curriculum. However, appropriate segments of the widely used "Jesus" film are shown at



PILING ON — Young people at Emmanuel Church in Rochester, Minn., enjoy a game of piling on during an after-church fellowship. Emmanuel Church is seeking to reach Muslims in their area through such ministries and activities. (Special photo)

Christmas and Easter, followed by "comprehension" discussion. When available, the students also receive gospel literature in their native language.

"We see people out of our ESL classes making professions of faith, but most of the time that does not result in baptism," the

pastor said. "Most of the time they receive Christ as Savior, we help them to grow as a Christian, and then after a year or two they go back to their countries. We feel like we're sending out missionaries."

"We're also wanting them to feel a warmth, welcome and friendship not only to our church but to America," Ray continued. "We want them to go back to their homeland and be friends to America."

Emmanuel Church allocates \$400 a year for ESL out of its total \$244,419 church budget.

"I think a church needs to assess its community," Pastor Ray said. "If the need is apparent, ESL is an excellent, inexpensive and very productive way of both teaching English and sharing the Gospel with individuals."



cpmissions

THE COOPERATIVE PROGRAM

Caring People Partnering Together to Touch the World

The spiritual condition of the church

"Our church, Crowder, has a long history of giving. We give 25% of our undesignated gifts to the Cooperative Program. In the Delta, we really struggle, but people step up and give sacrificially in so many ways."

"I've pastored Crowder for four years. None of our programs have suffered because of our giving to the Cooperative Program. There was a man who came back to our church after forty years, saw the needs locally, and established a 'Good Samaritan' fund, an endowment, to help us in our local work. It was a great encouragement to our people."

"I believe you can tell the spiritual condition of a church by how much the people give, and especially how much they give to missions."

— Ben James, pastor
Crowder Church
North Delta Association

Atlantic coast church touching community

BRANT ROCK, Mass. (BP) — A mottled gray sea wall and vibrant expanse of grassy lawn are all that protect Victory Baptist Church from the Atlantic Ocean.

The stone building in which the congregation meets was built in 1896, but that's not the reason for the name. When Southern Baptists started Victory Church in 1981, early converts for the most part consisted of transients recovering from alcohol and drug abuse, and a former prostitute or two.

Then a resort town with \$1,000 per week summer rentals, Brant Rock and the entire Marshfield region have become bedroom communities for people who work in Boston, 25 miles north.

Like Plymouth, Mass., about 15 miles south, where Pilgrims landed in the New World in 1620, Victory Church has become a rock on which its community can stand.

Members consider the 20,000 people who live in the Marshfield region as well as the entire world to be their community, said Pastor Bob Remick, who also works as an insurance agent.

According to Remick, Victory Church has grown one person at a time, one family at a time, because someone from the church has reached out.

"That's the way it always works," he said.

"People around the world are drawn to God's love by people who already have that love, and the more of that love you share, the more you have to share — and to keep."

"The Cooperative Program (CP Missions) works the same way," he continued. "Without the broad vision of CP missions, you have tunnel vision that limits you. With it you can see that the more you're able to give, the more you will be blessed."

Victory dedicates 16% of its offerings to Cooperative Program (CP) Missions for Southern Baptist mission work around the world, 8% to the Greater Boston Baptist Association, and 5% to Trans World Radio.

"It's the church voting on this, not my pushing for it," Remick said. The church has increased its CP Missions giving by 8% since Remick was called as pastor in 1987. It has increased associational giving by 6% in that same time period.

"We just felt this was what God wanted us to do, as we saw God providing for our needs," the pastor added.

Ray Allen, now director of stewardship and evangelism for the New England Baptist Convention, started Victory Church in 1981. Bob and Brenda Remick and their three children, then members at Duxbury (Mass.) Church, offered to help since Bob had background in music education and Sunday School, and Brenda could play the piano.

In 1987, when that church grew to the point it could support a full-time pastor, Remick resigned. Victory Baptist, which had gone 18 months without a pastor, had lost all but a handful of its members. They called Remick to help them rebuild.

Now the congregation numbers about 70. In addition to Sunday worship and Sunday School, there's Weight Watchers Monday nights, Wednesday night prayer meeting, and Thursday morning women's Bible study.



Victory Church in Brant Rock, Mass.

Pinelake Church cultivates global vision

By Tony Martin
Associate Editor

Pinelake Church in Rankin Association is one of the leading churches in the state in Cooperative Program (CP) giving, based on the percentage of their undesignated gifts. Additionally, Pinelake has mobilized her people to develop a Christian worldview that is expressed through both giving and going.

Shelby Neese has been on staff at Pinelake Church for twelve years. He has the longest tenure of any staff person currently serving the church. He originally came to Pinelake as minister of music, but soon added missions responsibilities. One year ago he became Pinelake's missions pastor.

"The church has always been missions involved," Neese said, "but we weren't activists. Under God's leadership we've developed a holistic approach to missions."

This next year, for example, teams from Pinelake will be going to Mexico, Ukraine, Kenya, and Maryland.

Neese and his wife Mary began serving in Costa Rica soon after graduating from seminary, but less than a year into language school had to return to the states because of health reasons.

When pastor Chip Henderson gave Neese the opportunity to choose between continuing to serve in the music and worship area, or to concentrate in missions, Neese chose to follow God's leadership in developing a missions strategy for the church.

Forming a Missions Ministry Team, Pinelake has channeled much of its energy into the global missions arena. The missions ministry mission statement reads, "Led by the Holy Spirit, we will enable believers to share the Gospel in word and deed." The congregation has been led to be on mission with God by using Acts 1:8 as a model. The church sees the Ross Barnett Reservoir as Jerusalem; metro Jackson as Judea; Mississippi and the U.S. as Samaria; and the ends of the earth including

Mexico, Ukraine, Belarus, and "wherever the Lord leads."

"We don't look at Acts 1:8 as concentric circles, nor do we approach this passage sequentially. We look at these areas as being reached simultaneously, with different people expressing their gifts and abilities based on how God leads them," said Neese.

"I personally want to lead people to become actively involved in missions," Neese continued. "This ties in with the 'win, build, and send' responsibility of our church. We want to open people's eyes to God's global purpose."

"Look at Jesus," Neese said. "He wasn't exactly a world traveler, but he intentionally disciplined his followers to have his Father's world view."

"He walked them through the very center of Samaria," Neese pointed out. "Can you imagine what it was like for a bunch of Jewish boys to be in that part of the world? He sends them to town while he talks with the woman at the well. Can you imagine the conversations they had after exposure to those people and that culture?"

Pinelake's desire for local missions led to the creation of Mission Metro, a non-profit organization operating inside the sphere of the church to take the Gospel of Christ to the people in Metro Jackson and central Mississippi. Mission Metro's activities in 2002 include Rainbow Express, a summer Backyard Bible Club ministry to apartment complexes and parks in Hinds and Rankin Counties. "We found that we couldn't get on some properties as Pinelake Church," said Neese, "but we could as Mission Metro. The response has been incredible."

"What we try to do is take our people — volunteers — out of the church, and let them catch the vision of what God's doing," said Neese. "For instance, we've got a Sunday School class that, at one of our missions conferences last year, determined to start a ministry to a woman's prison in Rankin County. From that, they're trying to start a ministry to those same women for when they're released."

Neese acknowledges that not everyone has the time or resources to participate in mission trips. "God hasn't called us to be in all these places physically," said Neese, "but we are all called to either be a sender or a goer. Sending can involve many different aspects of missions, not the least of which is supporting mission causes financially."

Not all churches can be like Pinelake, with a pastor whose responsibilities include mission work. When asked what typical Mississippi churches could do, Neese replied, "Ask God to open your eyes to see the fields around you. Have the faith to act on what God shows you and that God will provide the resources."



CP Missions fuels world evangelism view

"Without the broad vision of CP missions, you have tunnel vision that limits you," says Bob Remick, pastor of Victory Church in Brant Rock, Mass. (see page three inside). "With it you can see that the more you're able to give, the more you will be blessed."

Remick echoes the sentiments of pastors who share a Southern Baptist worldview that has produced what has been labeled "The most effective Christian missions support concept in existence."

It is called the Cooperative Program, or CP Missions. In it, Southern Baptists have a multifaceted, comprehensive, far-reaching missionary endeavor that is undergirded by a national network of churches united by a common bond in Christ, a common understanding of the church, and a common passion for preaching the Gospel to the entire world.

Any vision that doesn't envision the "uttermost parts of the world" is too small. "I believe God wants to do something extraordinary among us," Executive Committee President Morris Chapman told last year's Southern Baptist Convention in New Orleans, "and it

will come only when we are able to determine what God wants of us for the sake 'not simply of myself, not of my church, not of my association, not of my state convention, not of the SBC' but when we discover what it is that God wants us to do for the kingdom's sake."

Any plan capable of implementing that vision must be just as expansive. That is why CP Missions is so vital! Robert Butt, Pastor of the Calvary Baptist Church in Saskatchewan, Canada, appreciates the expansiveness of CP Missions. "We like being part of something bigger than we are," he said. "The Cooperative Program motivates us and stretches us and gets us involved around the world; because we have a system that is both simple and effective."

After 77 years of Cooperative Program operation, the results, the lives that have been touched, speak for themselves. In excess of 31 million people have been baptized worldwide through the cooperative efforts of more than 21 thousand International and North American missionaries, hundreds of thousands of volunteers, and more than 42,000 local congregations. In addition, more than 141 thousand pastors, missionaries, and ministry leaders have been equipped through six seminaries, and over 31 thousand retired pastors and their widows, many living below poverty level, have received assistance. This cooperative "world" view has also empowered Southern Baptists to support colleges and universities; plant thousands of new congregations; care for children, the poor, the elderly; reach out to minorities and to internationals in the USA; and to speak up for the family and for religious liberty. The list of kingdom accomplishments goes on.

Anthony Jordan, Executive Director/Treasurer of the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma says CP Missions is one of the main reasons why he is a Southern Baptist. "The most distinctive reason I am a Southern Baptist is because of the way we do missions," said Jordan. "The Cooperative Program allows me to put my arms around the world."

The bottom line of this cooperative worldview is its effectiveness. Whether state missions, North American missions, or International missions, CP Missions is reaching more people and sending more people than ever before.



JUST FOR THE RECORD

First Church, Gulfport, will feature John Maxwell, author; Lou Holtz, coach; and Denis Waitley, motivational expert in a satellite simulcast on April 27, from 8-11 a.m. For additional information, call the church at (228) 863-8501.

Alta Woods Church, Jackson, will present the Mississippi College Singers and Chamber Choir in their home concert of the 2002 spring tour. The concert will be April 14 at 6:30 p.m. For additional information, call (601) 925-3440.

Marriage Enrichment Weekend, led by Dwight and Kay (Thomas) Falkenberry, will be held at Derma Church, Derma, April 12 and 13. A candlelight dinner will be held at 6:30 p.m. on Friday, and sessions will continue on Saturday beginning at 1 p.m. For additional information, call the church at (662) 628-5595.

Cleary Church, Florence, will be hosting a Spring Celebration on April 14 in the 10 a.m. and 6 p.m. worship services. Guest evangelist will be Bill Bozeman of Mobile, Ala., with his wife Ro Bozeman, guest musician. For additional information, contact the church at (601) 845-2020.

The Flowood Baptist Sixth Annual Golf Tournament, sponsored by Flowood Church, Brandon, will begin at 8 a.m. on April 27 at Willow Creek in Brandon. For additional information, contact Eddie Cook at (601) 992-3711 or the church at (601) 992-6464.

Cedarview Church, Olive Branch, will host the Geeslin Brothers in concert at 6 p.m. on April 20. Delta Blue will be the featured musicians on May 18 at 6 p.m. For additional information, call (662) 895-2661.



WMU ladies of Gaston Church, Booneville, realized many of their senior ladies didn't attend Wednesday night services because they didn't drive at night. With this in mind, the Lurleen Davis Bible Group was formed. Meetings are held the second Monday morning of each month. Brenda Massey is WMU president.



Family fun night was held in the gym at First Church, Maben, on March 22. There were 57 adults and children present, including the Easter bunny.

*Their name means
"people with no God."
This May, let's introduce them.*

Loving the Tuareg of West Africa

2002 Day of Prayer and Fasting
for World Evangelization

May 19, 2002

BAPTIST COLLEGE NEWS

William Carey College (WCC) has announced application deadlines for the summer and fall terms. Students interested in attending WCC must have their completed applications turned into the Admissions Office by April 26 for the summer and July 19 for the fall term. The new application deadlines ensure that a student's paperwork is processed 30 days prior to the first day of class. Requirements for admis-

sion include the standard application, an immunization form, ACT or SAT scores, official high school transcript, official transcripts from other colleges attended, and a completed FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form. Admission packets are available on the Hattiesburg campus or can be obtained by calling (601) 318-6103, (800) 962-5991 ext. 103, or email admissions@wmcarey.edu.

But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name (John 1:12).

If you make a decision for Jesus Christ today, contact a local Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

It's Fun! Great Workout
Come be a part of the Healthier Christian Weekend!

Christian Aerobic Resource Workshop 2002

"The Leading Edge... A Healthier, Balanced Body"

Boot Camp...Christian Yoga...Step and Floor Aerobics...Pilates

Friday, May 3, 2002 5-10 p.m.

Saturday, May 4, 2002 8-12:30

First Baptist Church - Christian Life Center
Jackson, Mississippi

Cost/Registration...

4 weeks prior to event	\$99
3 weeks prior to event	\$109
1 to 2 weeks prior to events	\$119
At the door	\$130

* For more information please call the Christian Life Center at (601) 949-1945 or 1947.

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NOBTS to revise doctoral program

NEW ORLEANS (BP) — Revisions to the doctor of philosophy program at New Orleans Seminary have been approved by trustees in an effort to be more responsive to students' needs and enhance the academic quality of the program.

The revisions to the Ph.D. program were the product of a faculty committee that worked more than a year studying the top accredited Ph.D. programs in religion. The committee, headed by seminary provost Steve Lemke, made the recommended changes after receiving input from current doctoral students and faculty.

In another move to be more student-friendly, the doctoral admissions committee now will meet sooner in the year so that doctoral candidates can learn of their acceptance earlier, Ray said.

For more information, contact the NOBTS Office of Research Doctoral Programs at 1-800-NOBTS-01 or (504) 816-8010; fax, (504) 816-8039; or e-mail, phd@nobts.edu.

Solkan spreading Gospel in 'foreign land'

LINCOLN, Neb. (BP) — Vitaly Solkan was at his job in Estonia in 1988 when his supervisor came up to him and said someone needed to speak with him.

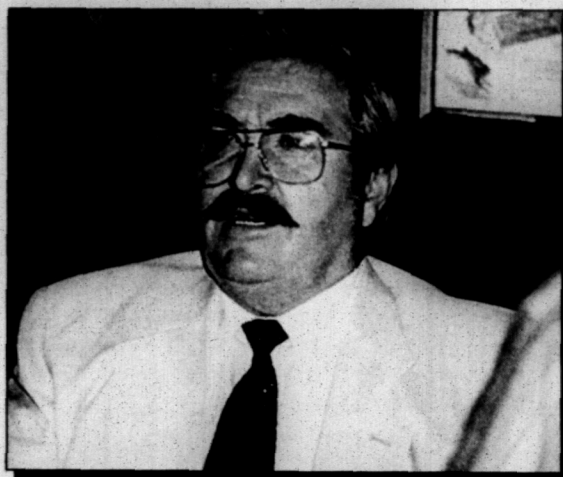
Outside, standing near a black car, in dark suits, two men approached the wary Solkan and began peppering him with questions. "Who are you?" they asked Solkan. "No, who are you?" Solkan answered.

Finally, the men said they were with the KGB and were going to find out about his role with the Christian church in the Soviet Union. When Solkan said he had nothing to tell, he was threatened with prison. The men of the former Russian secret police finally grew tired and resorted to other scare tactics. The KGB stripped Solkan and his family of their passports, driver's licenses, and all paperwork giving evidence of their citizenship. A raid of their home resulted in the removal of all Bibles, hymnals, and anything that associated him with Christianity.

"Your God is in America, so it is time you go there," the KGB told Solkan and sent him to Rome where he was handed over to the United States Consulate. Seeing

he and his family were refugees, Vitaly Solkan was allowed to enter America and was sent to Lincoln, Neb., in 1989.

With his wife, Nadezhda, and their seven children (two children died at an early age in Estonia), the Solkans arrived in Nebraska with a few clothes, no money, and without the ability to speak English.



Solkan

Crying to the Lord, Solkan said, "I speak no English, help me Lord, give me this tongue."

Assisted by the Ukrainian Catholic church in Lincoln, Solkan was told he must attend that church or he would not be given help.

Not eager to be involved there, however, the Solkans were once again alone in unfamiliar surroundings.

Someone told Emmet Cooke, a member of Southview Church, about the Solkan family and he immediately came to their rescue. Cooke and members of Southview took them in and helped them get settled. Before long, Solkan was learning English, working and making a new life in the United States.

The story does not end there however,

because a man such as Solkan, with his gregarious personality, contagious smile and his heartfelt desire to tell everyone he meets about Jesus — it was not long before he had helped organize a church that included other Russian-born Christian immigrants. Through witnessing, meeting new immigrants at the airport on their first day in the country, this church now has 130 members and is known as the First Slavic Baptist Church and meets in Southview's facilities each week.

A multitude of people like the Solkans are arriving in Lincoln each year, many in the same situation. Reaching these new groups with the Gospel is a challenge for the Eastern Nebraska Association.

Covering the state's two largest cities, Lincoln and Omaha, mission work with nearly a dozen different language groups in these cities is a formidable task, but a task that is being prayerfully tackled.

"Our church start work team is praying for the Lord to open up a church start movement among our congregations," Smith said. "We pray for the Holy Spirit to create a hunger among our people to start new churches."

Over 12 years later, Solkan is still enthusiastic about his journey to the United States and continues to help others reach the various language groups for the Lord.

"I like to talk to people about Jesus," he affirmed with his still heavy Russian accent. "I pray for God to open my mind and tell me how to talk to people about Jesus."

STAFF CHANGES

First Church, Newton, has called **Leroy Brewer** as pastor effective March 17. A native of Starkville, Brewer received his education at Southwest College, Mississippi State University, Trinity Seminary, and New Orleans Seminary. His previous place of service was First Church, Fannin.

James L. Fletcher, pastor of Friendship Church, Columbus, for nine years, will retire on April 7. He has served 52 years in the ministry. A special service recognizing Fletcher and his wife Nell, will be held at 2 p.m.

East End Church, Columbus, will honor **Jerry Haley**, pastor for eight years, with a noon luncheon and a service at 1:15 p.m. Haley will retire on April 28 and will be moving to Baker, Fla.

Palmer Church, Benton-Tippah Association, has called **Thomas M. Belcher** as pastor. He is a graduate of Samford University and Beeson Divinity School in Homewood, Ala. His previous place of service was Bethlehem Church, Dilwyn, Va.

Summerland Church, Taylorsville, has recently called **Mark Farris** as pastor. He previously served as youth minister at Petal Harvey Church, Petal.

Oak Grove, Lake, has called **Keith McGee** as pastor, effective Feb. 10. A native of Scott County, McGee is a graduate of Belhaven College, Jackson.

John Ed Snell retired on March 17 after serving 27 years at Utica Church, Utica. A spe-

cial service began at 10:30 a.m. with introduction of family and special guests and presentation of gifts to Snell and his wife Shirley. After the service, dinner was served and a reception was held in the Family Life Center. Snell also served as pastor of Sturgis Church, Sturgis, and First Church, Jena, La. The Snells are now residing in Chattanooga, Tenn.

First Church, Durant, has called

Matt Brady as pastor effective Jan. 27. He previously served as associate pastor and youth minister at Merton Avenue Church,



The Bradys

Memphis, Tenn. Brady received his education at Howard Payne University, Brownwood, Texas, and Mid-America Seminary, Germantown, Tenn. His wife, Beth, is teaching GAs and serving as the 2002 VBS director.



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REUNION PLANNED

Editor:

Camp Lakeside, located in Tallahatchie County and currently run by the North Central Association, will host a former staff reunion on May 4 for any former counselors, directors, chairmen, or cooks who have worked at the camp since its beginnings in the 1960s. Please contact the current chairman/director, Ben Kennedy, at (662) 647-8878 for details.

Ben Kennedy
Charleston

SICKENED

Editor:

As I read the ongoing banter over Rivercrest Fellowship and the hiring of a female pastor, I am sickened over the incredible ignorance of her fundamentalist detractors. They quote Paul's advice to Timothy about qualifications of a minister but fail to understand or avoid the concept that in the first century a woman had no status, she could barely inherit her dead husband's property, she couldn't testify in court, and her male children were the only guarantee that she wouldn't starve on the streets if catastrophe struck — very similar to the way women were treated in Afghanistan recently under the Taliban. Under those circumstances why would Paul waste his breath instructing Timothy on what the qualifications of a woman pastor would be?

Fundamentalists, you cannot hide your gender bias under the cover of Scripture in this case, especially since Paul wrote Gal. 3:28. I especially despise the slander concerning Rivercrest Fellowship and the desire to disfellowship them. These folks are not liberal! They debated on their need for a minister and

after much prayer and deliberation decided that the best man for the job was a woman. You need to lay aside your favored controversies and bigotries, get on your knees, and desire to become what the Word of God would have you become.

Ed Williamson
Canon City, Co.

THANKS FOR SUPPORT

Editor:

Please may I express my most sincere gratitude for the many kindnesses and thoughtful deeds extended to our family during Guy's illness and death. We have been overwhelmed to realize the number of friends he had and the impact he had on so many lives. Words just aren't adequate to express our thanks.

Guy gave his life, literally, to the Lord and he enjoyed his years of service in all the various areas in which God allowed him

to work. Preaching was his greatest calling, and preach he did from the smallest of rural churches to large urban churches to thatched-roof churches in Korea and bamboo-walled churches in the Philippines. May his message of God's redeeming love continue through the lives of those who come behind him.

Lois Henderson
Clinton

IN AGREEMENT

Editor:

We are writing to express our agreement with a response by Sammy Burns, pastor of Cedar Bluff Church, in the March 7 issue. In his response Burns was disagreeing with a previous editorial in the February 21 issue, which stated, "Baptists have been adamantly opposed to creedalism, virtually since the beginnings of our faith." Burns pointed out, "Baptists began as

a creedal (or confessional) people," and that the book, *A History of Mississippi Baptists*, gives "several examples of 'creedal' confessions of faith from the first churches and associations in our state."

It is our belief that if we as Southern Baptists knew and understood Baptist history, we would find our roots in the Reformation. From these early Protestants came confessions of what they believed. The principles of the earlier confessions have not changed; we have. The Baptist Faith and Message of 2000 is an excellent standard of confession, which articulates our beliefs in biblical truth. Are we as church members aware that we have a confession, and do we know what it says?

In our free-for-all society, doctrinal creeds are great instruments with which to stake our claim of faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rex & Faye McCord
Terry

REVIVAL DATES

New Sardis, Mount Olive: April 21-24; Sunday, 10:45 a.m., lunch, and 1:15 p.m. service; Mon.-Wed., 7 p.m.; Charles Burnham, Magee, evangelist; Shelby and Barbara Colson, Magee, music; James Garner, pastor.

Cedarview, Olive Branch: April 21-24; Sunday, 10:30 a.m., noon luncheon, and 7 p.m.; Mon.-Wed., 7 p.m.; Paul E. Brown, Cordova, Tenn., evangelist; Phillip Willis, Baton Rouge, La., music; Robert Dottley, pastor.

First, Sumrall: April 14-19; Sunday, 10 a.m. and 7 p.m.; Mon.-Fri., 7 p.m.; W. D. "Step" Martin, evangelist; Hubert Greer, music; Glenn Davis, pastor.

Farmhaven, Canton: April 12-14; Friday and Saturday, 7 p.m.; Sunday, 10:45 a.m., lunch, and 6 p.m.; Grant McElveen, Puckett, evangelist; Mickey Gentry, Pontotoc, music; June McKee, Clinton, pianist; Terrie Paulson, Farmhaven Church, keyboard; Charles Gentry, pastor.

Springfield, Carthage: April 14-17; Sunday, 11 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Mon.-Wed., 7 p.m.; Hubert Yates, Neshoba County, evangelist; Stan W. Tucker, pastor.

Meadowview, Starkville: April 14-18; Sunday, 10:15 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Mon.-Thurs., 10 a.m. and 7 p.m.; Charles Smith, evangelist; Shawn Bigham, music; Ronnie Hatfield, pastor.

Trinity, Laurel: April 21-24; Sunday, 10:30 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Mon.-Wed., 6:30 p.m.; Wayne

Dubose, Minden, La., evangelist; Todd Dubose, Lucedale, music; Tom Boone, pastor.

Ridgela Heights, Escatawpa: April 21-24; Sunday, 11 a.m. and 6:30 p.m.; Mon.-Wed., 6:30 p.m.; Greg Potts, Vancleave, guest speaker; Brad Day, Agricola, music; Steve Cirlot, pastor.

South McComb, McComb: April 14-17; Sunday, 11 a.m. and 6 p.m.; Mon.-Wed., 7 p.m.; Sonny Adkins, Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, evangelist; Tim Morrison, Monticello, music; Ted Bowlin, pastor.

Pinckney, Union: April 21-24; Sunday, 11 a.m. and 7 p.m.; Mon.-Wed., 7 p.m.; Don Taylor, Conehatta, evangelist; Marion Felton, Lake, music; Mike Fondren, Sr., pastor.

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ALTA WOODS BAPTIST CHURCH is seeking a Kindergarten/Daycare Director. Resumes may be sent to 168 Colonial Drive, Jackson, MS 39204.

PART-TIME CHURCH SECRETARY NEEDED: people, computer, and clerical skills required. Please send resume to 5199 Lakeland Drive, Flowood, MS 39232 or fax to (601) 992-4242.

CHURCH AVERAGING 100 in Sunday School seeks full-time minister of music and youth or bi-vocational minister of music. Please send resume to Calvary Baptist Church, 2878 Old Hwy. 27, Vicksburg, MS 39180; or fax to (601) 636-7574.

FAITH BAPTIST CHURCH, Jackson is seeking a part-time staff member for a unique home bound ministry for members and the neighborhood. For more information, contact Dr. Greg Wolfe, P.O. Box 13675, Jackson, MS 39236, Phone (601)368-2983.

MAIN STREET BAPTIST CHURCH Goodman, MS - seeking a bi-vocational or full-time pastor. Please send resume' to: Pastor Search Committee, Main Street Baptist Church, P.O. Box 206, Goodman, MS 39079-0206.

CHILDREN'S DIRECTOR NEEDED - Part-time position. Send resume' to: 2875 Oak Forest Dr., Jackson, MS 39212 - Attn: Personnel Committee.

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF GLENDALE, Hattiesburg, is seeking a part-time music minister and part-time youth minister, or a full-time minister of youth/music. Send resume to 20 John Kinnard Loop, Hattiesburg, MS 39401 or fax (601)544-0415

EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATOR ASSISTANT POSITION AVAILABLE - Growing church in Rankin County seeking an Executive Administrative Assistant for their music ministry. Applicants must possess good organizational, computer, and people skills. Music knowledge and experience is a plus. Qualified applicants, please fax resume' and salary requirements to (601) 825-2599 today, Attn: Kathy Wolfe.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Unsigned letters will not be printed. No multi-copy or form letters will be used.

Each correspondent must include an address and telephone number for verification. In special instances, name may be withheld at writer's request and editor's discretion.

Please include the name of cooperating Mississippi Baptist church where correspondent is a member. (Mississippi Baptists' letters will receive priority when space is limited.)

Letters must be limited to 250 words. All correspondence is subject to editing.

Correspondents should refrain from personal attacks. The opinions expressed in letters to the editor do not necessarily reflect the views of the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board.

No more than one letter from any individual will be printed during a three-month period.

When in the judgement of the editor a given issue has received sufficient attention, correspondence dealing with it will no longer be published and a notice will be printed to that effect.

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By Charles Marx
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LNC ESUPCT EBAGLN; DKL
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ONBSS OLBRA EUT CJCT.
VOBVBN EUTLM: CVFNL

Clue: F = G

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Mark Five: Thirty-Four.

Wedgwood dedicates memorial to victims

FORT WORTH, Texas (BP) — During an emotional service March 30, members of Wedgwood Church and the Fort Worth community dedicated a memorial to seven victims of the nation's worst church shooting.

Larry Gene Ashbrook, 47, entered the south foyer and sanctuary of the church on Sept. 15, 1999, and fired randomly into the crowd comprised mostly of young people who were celebrating at a "See You at the Pole" event.

Ashbrook wounded seven others before taking his own life. Killed were Shawn Brown, 23; Kim Jones, 23; Sydney Browning, 36; Joey Ennis, 14; Cassie Griffin, 14; Kristi Beckel, 14; and Justin Stegner Ray, 17.

Brown and Jones were ministerial students at Southwestern Seminary in the Texas city. Browning was part of the ministerial staff at Wedgwood Church. Ennis, Griffin, Beckel, and Ray were at the church as part of a celebration of prayer around flagpoles at area schools and other schools across the country.

Pastor Al Meredith called the service a "celebration of life and dedication of the memorial plaza honoring the seven martyrs who died Sept. 15, 1999."

During the two-hour ceremony, Meredith also noted that the gunman was unable to extinguish the spiritual life of those who died.

"The day after the shooting, I could honestly stand before reporters and say that we

grieve not as those who have no hope. As far as we know, all of these kids are with the Lord."

Erected just outside the south foyer of the sanctuary, the memorial plaza consists of an eight-sided granite monument. Seven sides are dedicated to each of the martyrs bearing their name, photo, date of birth, and a description of the individual written by the family. The eighth side describes the events of the evening of Sept. 15.

Black-granite prayer benches surround the 17,000-pound monument that includes a flagpole. Cold Spring Granite Co. in Cold Spring, Minn., manufactured the monument from granite obtained in India.

Meredith introduced a family member of each of the victims and invited them to the pulpit to speak. As each made their way to the front they paused to light a candle of remembrance and hope.



Wedgwood memorial

Kathy Jo (Brown) Rogers, who remarried last year and is expecting a child, said she has learned much about God through Shawn's death. She had to learn to trust God fully since the shooting, she said.

"I never really had to trust God with something I didn't understand. I had to learn that God is sovereign and doesn't waste anything."

Rogers has established a scholarship fund at Southwestern Seminary in memory of her late husband.

Stan and Stephanie Jones returned from Saudi Arabia to remember their daughter. They distributed pieces of a puzzle to those present. Life, they said, is like a puzzle, "and God knows how all of the pieces fit together." What is certain, she said, is that they will see their daughter again.

New book on Islam written by sibling converts

DALLAS (BP) — Two Southern Baptist scholars have teamed up to offer a comprehensive analysis of the world's second-largest religion. Their presentation of the practices, ethics and beliefs of Islam is more than an academic recitation of the differences between Christianity and Islam. It's the story of two brothers' conversion from the religion of their childhood to a living relationship with Jesus Christ.

Unveiling Islam is a new release from Kregel Publications intended to educate readers about Islam and provide a practical strategy Christians can use to

open a productive dialogue with Muslims. Ergun M. Caner, assistant professor of theology and church history at Criswell College in Dallas, and Emir F. Caner, assistant professor of church history and Anabaptist studies at South-eastern Seminary in Wake Forest, N.C., admit that the work was far from "a labor of love."

Raised in a strict Muslim home, the Caner boys admired their Turkish father even after his parents divorced after moving to Ohio. They participated in daily prayers, celebrated Ramadan, and read from the Koran regularly. Hoping their good deeds would outweigh any bad

deeds, the Caners' devotion was not an act of love, but rather fear, they write in their book.

Thus, the writing of the book was "an arduous and sometimes painful exercise of remembering unspoken mental pictures that are never far from view," the Caners note in their book. "We were taught that Christianity and Islam were antithetical, stemming from a centuries-old conflict dating back to the Crusades, when Muslims were slaughtered by the thousands."

Ultimately, it was a friend's invitation to attend a revival service at a Baptist church that provided Ergun Caner an opportunity to hear the gospel and accept God's gift of salvation in Jesus. His other brother, Erdem, received Christ soon after, and Emir was saved a year later. Those decisions prompted their father to disown his sons.

Since 1982, Emir and Ergun Caner have preached and taught about Islam, sharing a desire for salvation among the 1.2 billion Muslim people who need Jesus. "Usually, churches and pastors would allow us to preach, graciously pat us on our heads, and

tell us how fascinating this world religion seems," the Caners stated in their book.

That reaction changed Sept. 11. "After thousands of people were incinerated in the World Trade Center bombing, people began to listen."

The heightened interest in Islam has drawn each of the Caner brothers into additional debate settings at mosques and universities, speaking in


English, French, and Arabic with Muslim scholars. They have been interviewed by the BBC, CNN, Moody Broadcasting Network, Salem Radio Network, and USA Radio. Talk show invitations have come from Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, Marlon Maddux, and Zola Levitt. They're scheduled to address the April 28-30 meeting of Evangelical Christian Publishers Association.

Ergun Caner

Emir Caner




Emir Caner



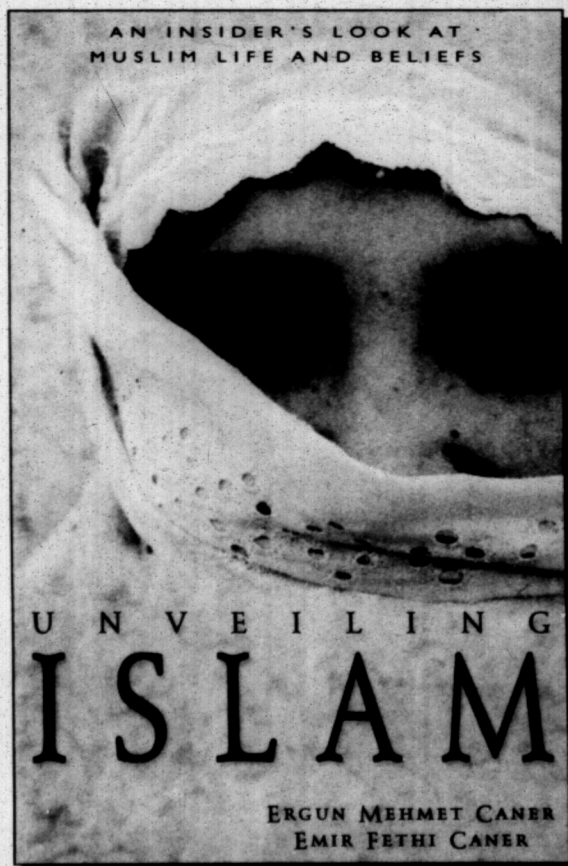
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FAMILY BIBLE STUDY

Evidences of a genuine religion

Amos 4:1-6:14

By Sandra Gunn

How utterly depressing it must have been for Amos to continue preaching God's message of judgement to a disobedient people. Yet he persevered because it was God's message given to him to proclaim. It was not Amos' message. He was only the messenger, answering God's call on his life.

Amos was primarily speaking to the people of his day. God inspired Amos to read the signs of his own time. This is not to say that the message of Amos cannot be applied to our day — but his first responsibility was to the needs of God's people in the eighth century B.C. This message may not speak specifically to our age, but it definitely speaks of our age.

In chapter four, after God had disciplined them in many forms, he says five times, "yet you have not returned to me." Then comes the profound statement, "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel." This statement is jarring, for the most important preparation we will ever make is to meet him!

Amos begins a lamentation over Israel in chapter five. Usually a lamentation comes after a great calamity to express grief, but in this case, Amos seemed sure that God would punish Israel, so he grieved as though she had already fallen.

The sin of Israel is described by some commentaries as ritualism with no heart. Sound familiar? There was no sincere and true worship in any of their



Gunn

worship centers. Their worship was false and meaningless, a ritualism which resulted in spiritual blindness and social injustice. If their worship had been genuine, it would have made a difference in their daily living.

God twice said, "Seek me and live." The great implication here is that true life and real living comes only as we seek God. This is not a Sunday morning seeking; it is a daily seeking, even a minute by minute seeking.

Tradition is not necessarily to be equated with God. Man does not always find God in the traditional ways. God is always God, but he reveals himself in many wonderful ways. If we only seek him through tradition, then we could be missing out on some wonderful revelations of God!

Ponder this illustration from an unknown source: On a certain Sunday morning the Devil passed a church and paused to listen to the songs coming from

within. The congregation was singing, "Where he leads me I will follow," "I Surrender All," and "My Jesus, I Love Thee." A passerby asked the Devil why he didn't go in and disrupt the service. "Doesn't worship like this frighten you?" he asked. The Devil assured him that he wasn't at all disturbed, and was heard to say, "They're praising God on Sunday, they'll be all right on Monday, it's just a little habit they've acquired!"

In chapter five, vv. 10-15, Amos condemns the people of Israel for their treatment of the poor. He condemns the judges for bribery, and pronounces God's judgement on them. Their sins were so great that they would never enjoy the fruits of their labor, for they had come by them dishonestly.

Again, he exhorts them to seek the Lord and live. It is only after seeking the Lord, fully giving our hearts to him, that we will produce the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22).

What does God require? In condemning the ritualistic practices of the people of Israel,

Amos' words from God were positive, not negative in his solution. It was not what they should not do, but what they should be willing to do. Amos 5:24 says that justice should pour forth from them like waters. This can only come about after a genuine seeking after God and his heart.

Religion has failed this nation. They had allowed formalism and idolatry to enter their worship and, as a result, injustice and righteousness to enter their hearts. Their religion had been a failure — condemned by God himself. It had brought death instead of life and darkness rather than light. Israel could not escape the consequences of her sin.

It seems to me that this lesson certainly can be applied to the individual, although it was given to a nation. We need to come in repentance and faith to a Holy God through a genuine and sincere relationship with him. This will not only transform an individual, but a nation.

Gunn is a member of First Church, Biloxi.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Experiencing God's blessings

Ephesians 3:14-21

By Robin Brumfield

This lesson is taken from Ephesians 3:14-21. It is about Paul's second prayer in Ephesians in which he asked that his readers would experience the fullness of God's blessings. The emphasis is on experiencing the full range of blessings that God wants to give his people.

There are a number of reasons why believers do not experience God's blessings, but they all center around one common cause. That cause is disobedience. One easy way to be obedient is to ask yourself, in all of life's situations, what would Jesus do if he were here right now and then do it!

Many adults receive only a very few of God's blessings,

such as salvation and assurance of eternity in heaven.

Some believers think this is everything being a Christian involves or is all that God is interested in doing for them. Others think that a few blessings are enough. They do not want to get too involved in Christianity and they certainly do not want to become fanatical about it. God desperately yearns for believers to experience the full range of his blessings, and he overwhelmingly wants to richly reward them to their full capacity.

Remember that tremendous Bible promise of the Lord Jesus Christ: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10; NIV). One translation puts it "that they



Brumfield

may have it abundantly." The point is clear: God wants to richly bless or reward those who are obedient to him.

The passage is broken into four sections. The first section deals with the Father who blesses (vv. 14-15). In beginning his second prayer for his readers, Paul emphasized that God is the Father of all his people.

These verses state that the "whole family in heaven and on the earth" derives its name from God the Father. Therefore, if God the Father is the Father of believers, and if we get blessings from above, then our earthly blessings come from our heavenly Father.

The second section is the steps to God's blessings (vv. 16-19a). The Greek text shows that these verses identify two successive steps to experiencing more of the blessings or rewards that God wants to give to believers.

First, believers receive spiri-

tual strength so Christ can make his home in them. Second, believers should constantly be rooting themselves in love so they can have a deeper understanding of God's love in Jesus Christ.

Believers do not take these steps themselves or on their own initiative. Only God can initiate and carry out these steps in believers.

Notice that "dwell" (v. 17) means to live permanently in a certain place or to be at home. Thus, the request for Christ to "dwell in your hearts by faith" refers to Christ's dwelling more fully in believers. It does not refer to Christ's coming in salvation.

Now, you may say, "This is all good and well, but how does it apply to my life?" The answer is very simple: believers who want to experience more of God's blessings need to be strengthened spiritually so they can be grounded in God's love in Christ.

The third section is the limitlessness of God's blessings (v.

19b). Let's clear up some possible confusion to the phrase "be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

This phrase does not mean we can or one day will become divine. It does describe the full blessings that God can give his people. In this section, the main emphasis is that Paul prayed for his readers to receive the unlimited blessings that God wanted to give them.

The fourth, and last, section is the assurance of God's blessings (vv. 20-21). Here, let's get right down to the point of this section. The main point is that Paul was confident that God not only had the power to grant the requests he made here, but he also was confident that God had the power to do even more than the apostle could ask or imagine.

Now for the application: God can do more than we ask and he blesses us with abundant rewards as we walk in obedience to him.

Brumfield is interim pastor of Goodwater Church, Forest.

Guidelines for submitting news and photographs

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention.

News submitted for publication in The Baptist Record must be either (a) typewritten, (b) neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper, or (c) neatly printed on standardized forms provided by the newspaper. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone.

News may be submitted electronically to the address below and must be contained in the message segment of an e-mail. Do not include a contact person's mail form. Due to increasing virus threats,



Attachments will be accepted. Attachments are permissible.

Articles should be concise. Include dates, times, and locations, where details of events are not included. Include a contact person's name and telephone number.

Photographs may be color or black and white. Instant photos and digital printouts are not reproducible. Digital photos may be used if submitted as a JPEG file via either (a) e-mail, (b) three-and-a-half inch floppy disk, or (c) CD. Photos must be clear, sharp, and well-lighted.

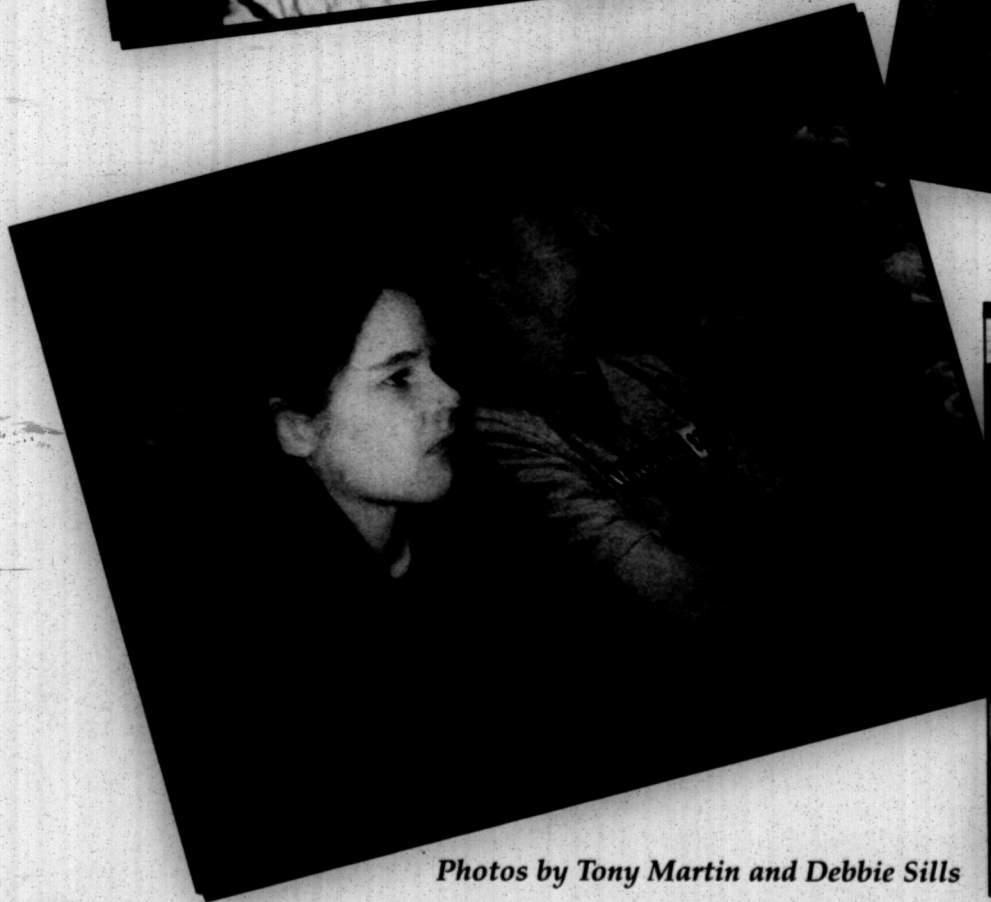
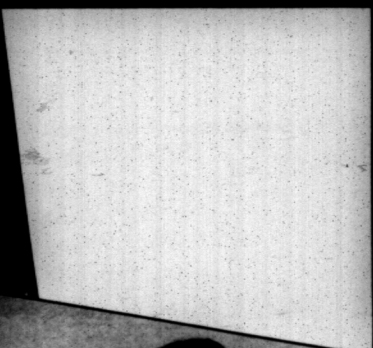
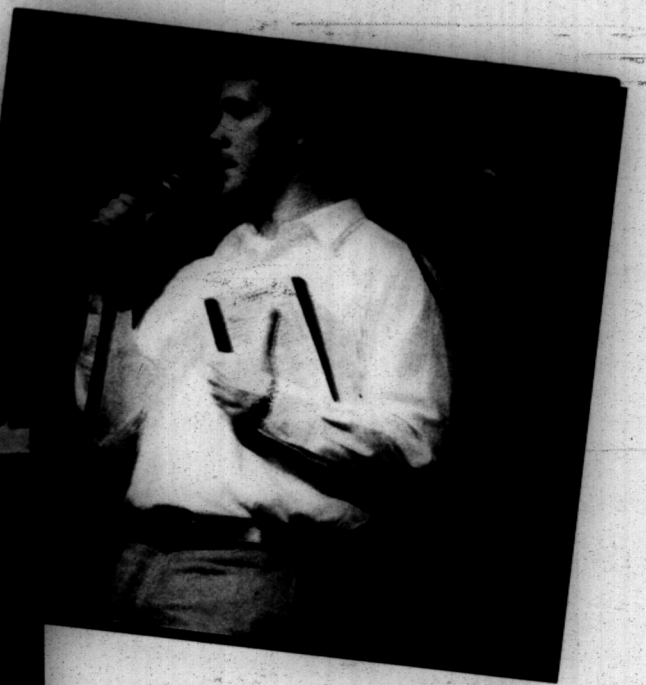
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Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis. Requests to return photographs must be accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope.

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